



Amendments to the Specification

In response to the Examiner's objection under 35 U.S.C. § 132(a), Applicants cancel the amendment to the specification at page 30, line 3 made in the previous Amendment.

At page 30, line 3 of the specification, please add the following replacement paragraph:

After the conditioning gas has passed through optional filter 106, distribution ring 107 smoothly diverts its flow. The conical lower surface of distribution ring, together with distribution casing bottom 104, forms a downward-angled annular channel 110 through which the conditioning gas flows along paths 150. Thus, the flow of conditioning gas turns downward toward muffle 33. In order to minimize turbulence in the flow of conditioning gas, the applicant has observed that annular channel 110 should be angled of an angle α of ~~about~~ at least 45° with respect to the longitudinal axis of the furnace, preferably of from about 40° C to about 20° , an angle α of about 30° being particularly preferred. If angle α is higher than about 45° , the flow of gas would not be sufficiently downward directed, thus possibly causing, in particular at high flow rates, undesirable gas turbulence due to an excessively high radial component of the gas flow entering the top chimney. On the other side, an angle of 0° (i.e. with an axial flow of gas, i.e. parallel to the longitudinal axis of the furnace) would be desirable as regards to the kinetic of the process, but difficult to realize in terms of apparatus, as in this case the distributor body should have a reduced cross section with respect to the remaining portion of the top chimney.